

The Iron Claw

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"THE WIRE TAPPERS," "GUN RUNNERS," ETC.
NOVELIZED FROM THE PATHE PHOTO PLAY OF THE SAME NAME

SYNOPSIS.

On Windward Island Pallidori intrigues Mrs. Golden into an appearance of evil which causes Golden to capture and torture the Italian by branding his face and crushing his hand. Pallidori floods the island and kidnaps Golden's little daughter Margery. Twelve years later in New York a Masked One rescues Margery from Legar and takes her to her father's home. Legar sends Golden a demand for the chart. The escaped chart is lost in a fight between Manley and one of Legar's henchmen, but is recovered by the Laughing Mask. Margery rescues the Laughing Mask from the police. Manley finds Margery not indifferent to his love. He saves her from Manley's poisoned arrows. Manley plans a mock funeral which fails to accomplish the desired purpose, the capture of the Iron Claw and his gang. Margery is saved from death at the hands of the Iron Claw by the Laughing Mask. An attempt by the Iron Claw to blow up the Mara cottage is frustrated in the nick of time. The Laughing Mask discloses his identity to Margery. Margery overhears the police's plan to take the Laughing Mask prisoner and hastens to warn him. They escape both the police and the Iron Claw. Later the Laughing Mask is almost taken while with Margery at her home. He eludes capture. Margery's father tells her that the Mask has met death. A mysterious woman frightens Legar's henchman into a promise of confession to clear the Laughing Mask. She meets Margery and discloses herself to that young lady as David Manley. Legar and his gang get possession of some loot and escape, taking Margery with them. The Laughing Mask adds to his mysteriousness by once more saving her from death. Margery rescues the chart of the Van Horn lost. The police attempt to arrest David as the Laughing Mask. The Mask appears on the scene. David saves Margery and her friends from Legar's henchmen, one of whom loses his life trying to escape. The police captain teaches Margery the helicopter. In an effort to save David she is almost trapped by Legar. The Laughing Mask comes to her aid. The code saves them. David discovers a diagram which is the means of averting the deaths of the Golden and their guests at a lawn banquet.

EIGHTEENTH EPISODE

The Green-Eyed God

"I thought you had discarded that theory, Captain Brackett," Margery Golden said in surprised tones. "I know you discovered some strongly convincing evidence, but when, with our own eyes, we saw both David Manley and the Laughing Mask in the same room at the same time, it stands to reason they must be different persons." Then she added softly to herself, "And I am sorry it turned out that way."

Just then one of the captain's men entered the room with news of a startling character written large on his face.

"Well, Jenkins, what is it?" tersely demanded his superior, and then as the self-important sleuth glanced at Margery, he added, "Miss Golden is in on this as much as any of us."

"Well, you see it happened like this," he began in a meditative voice, "I had been down a four-hour stretch down at the four corners. It was the blackest kind of a night and there wasn't even a stray rabbit for company. I hadn't seen anything that looked suspicious, so when Donovan comes along to spell me off, I thought I'd stop in a minute for a chat with Parker, the head gardener down at Wilken's place. I found the old man and his son, Joe, in the kitchen and they gave me a little something to take the dust out of my throat. We were settin' there quiet and peaceable, when all of a sudden I seen old Parker starin' at the open window with the eyes bulgin' out of his head. I took a squint myself and I'll be blamed if that slippery customer with the come mask wasn't lookin' right into my eyes."

"Jenkins," he says, quite calmlike, "you're a good man in your way, so I thought I'd tip you off that a couple of the Iron Claw's second-story workers are pullin' off a job right in this house while you're guzzling your beer. If you nab those two poreb-climbers," he says, "it ought to help that promotion yer lookin' for."

"Then he gives a little laugh an' with that he was gone. I thought he was kiddin' me along and I was pretty

sure by that time. I makes a dive through the window with Joe close behind me, but that masked Jerry had disappeared like he always does. "We did the best we could, chief, an' you ought to know it ain't no cinch to round up the Laughin' Mask. Well—as I was sayin', he made a clean getaway and me and Joe decided to take a look through the house to make sure he was only stringin' us. We went up them front stairs like a couple of gum-shoe artists an' then we seen somethin' was wrong,

The door of the room where Miss Wilkens sleeps stood open a little way and I caught the glim of a flashlight near where she keeps her jewel case. I shoved my hand just inside the door and pushed the light button. And there we was face to face with a couple of the most surprised and toughest lookin' crooks that I ever met up with. Miss Wilkens was lyin' there in the bed sleepin' like a baby."

"Them two housebreakin' agents of Legar's was as full of fight as a couple of Kilkenny cats. They whipped out their guns, and one of them fleshed him in the shoulder, while the other fetched Joe a crack over the head that put him to sleep for a minute. By the time Miss Wilkens had got her eyes open an' let out a scared screech there was through the window and clinkin' down the latticework."

"Wait a minute, Jenkins," Captain Brackett interrupted. "Your story may be very interesting, but what has this part of it got to do with the Laughing Mask?"

"I was just comin' to that," his subordinate replied in a somewhat aggrieved tone. "We got out the front door just as the thugs was makin' tracks for a racin' car they had hidden off to one side of the road. Old man Parker tried to stop 'em, but he got a wallop on the jaw that knocked him stiff. They jumps into the car and sends her off with the self-starter. We thought they was gone all right, when that automobile stops up with a jerk that pretty near put them motor bandits over the glass front. We was Johnny on the spot then, an' we colored our men in a hurry. An' say, what do you think put the kibosh on that joy ride getaway?"

"The thing that brought them crooks to a standstill was a rope as thick as my arm, with one end tied to the rear axle of the automobile and the other end made fast to a big tree. The wheels was buzzin' round, but they wasn't gettin' nowhere. An' the man who rigged up the contraption for stoppin' those crooks must have been that Laughin' Mask yer're after. We found those jailbirds had pretty bad records an' the commish said I was likely to get some good news in a couple of days. Perhaps this feller with the mask ain't as bad as you think, chief."

"Why doesn't he come out into the open, then, and explain these charges standin' against him, instead of sneakin' around like a masked safe-blower?" he demanded with considerable heat.

"I didn't know you wanted me to begin backwards," he said in ruffled tones. "I've got somethin' worth talkin' about all right, if you'll give me a chance to tell it."

"Please tell us everything that happened, Jenkins," Margery interposed. "Well, it certainly was some scrap. Miss Golden," answered the thief-catcher, addressing himself exclusively to the diplomatic girl, "an' the strangest part of the whole thing happened after I got the bracelets on them crooks and left Joe to watch them, while I went up to the house to see if anything was missin'."

"Just as I reached the house," he quickly resumed, "the moon broke through the clouds an' I stood lookin' into the garden, for I had a hunch that one-armed desperado might be hangin' around to superintend that job his men tried to pull off. Then, all at once, I seen Miss Wilkens, dressed in a kind of lace wrapper, standin' like a ghost down at the further end of the garden. An' she wasn't alone by a long shot. Talkin' to her, free and easy as if he'd known her all his life, was that darddevil, Laughin' Mask. I felt sort of obliged to him for tippin' me off about Legar's second-story workers, but I knew you was anxious to have a little talk with him, so I commences to sneak up on them night prowlers like an old Tom would go after a couple of sparrows. I had covered about half the distance when that masked Romeo grabs Miss Wilkens in his arms an' commences to kiss her like a happy bridegroom. An' she keeps comin' right back for more. I was that surprised I must have let my foot down heavy, for they broke apart and he goes through the hedge like a shot. When I comes up on the run there was only Miss Wilkens an' when I told her she was harborin' a man wanted by the law, she froze me up with a haughty stare."

"You must have been drinkin', officer," she says. "I just came out for a minute to calm my nerves after all that excitement an' the only person I've seen is an extremely rude policeman."

"I don't believe a word of the last part of your story," Margery cried in a voice perilously close to tears. "I don't believe the Laughing Mask was promenading about that garden with a strange young woman at midnight."

"We'll settle that when the time comes," said the police captain, "but right now young Manley is the one that needs watchin'. I thought maybe you'd feel like takin' me down where he's stayin' in your car."

Anxious to do anything which might tend to clear up the harassing doubts preying upon her mind, Margery willingly acquiesced in this plan. A little later the speedy, gray roadster containing the determined police captain and the troubled-faced girl drew up just around the bend of the road beyond the Ricks homestead, where David Manley had taken up his abode since his abrupt departure from the manor house of his former employer.

Suddenly Margery felt her heart quicken as she saw a familiar figure, with dejectedly drooping shoulders, cutting across the fields in the direction of Seven Oaks Hill. The keen-eyed officer caught sight of his quarry at almost the same moment.

"There's our man now," he said quickly, "and it's up to us to keep him in sight every minute."

Stealthily the slender girl and the burly captain, slipping from cover to cover, shadowed the abstracted Manley, who was apparently too occupied with his thoughts to be at all on his guard. He finally reached the summit of the hill and made straight for the lone boulder, where on a previous occasion the Laughing Mask had mysteriously eluded the hotly pursuing police captain. His trailers dodged into a near-by thicket and breathlessly waited the outcome of this strange procedure.

Nor had they long to wait. A few tense moments elapsed after David Manley disappeared from view behind the boulder and then another figure emerged from in back of that stone concealment. The features of the newcomer were shrouded by a yellow and grotesquely laughing mask.

Through that opening the two shadowers of the Laughing Mask saw him advancing toward a rose-mantled summerhouse at the end of a shaded walk. They saw a graceful girl, her flowerlike face aglow with eager expectation, suddenly emerge from the summerhouse and run to meet him with outstretched arms. Then as the two figures met for a moment in a close embrace a sharp cry of pent-up anguish burst from the white lips of Margery Golden.

As that soul-racked cry reached his ears, the perfidious masker broke from

the first part of his plan into execution. He went to the small mahogany writing desk standing in one corner of the gunroom and busied himself in clumsily guiding the pen held in his thick fingers over a half-sheet of notepaper.

"This ought to do the trick if anything will," he complacently announced, swinging about in his chair after a few moments of laborious effort, "now let's get this thing straight. I've signed Legar's name to this here billydoo, and it's just about the way he'd have written it himself. It's addressed to Dutch Frank in New York, and it says Legar has rigged up a plant to decoy you down to Wharton's Quarry at four o'clock this afternoon, an' he wants a couple of his strong-arm men sent right out to help pull off the abductin' job, and carry you back to the city. Now we'll take this fake message out to that big rock where we've seen the Laughing Mask hangin' around an' drop it in plain sight, kind of careless like, as though it had slipped out of Legar's pocket. Then if our man comes along an' he ain't too much taken up with his new lady friend, he's pretty likely to swallow this bait, hook an' sinker, an' if he goes down to Wharton's quarry at four o'clock this afternoon to give you a hand like he used to do he's goin' to get the biggest surprise party of his life."

When the stocky captain of police having "planted" his forged decoy in a conspicuous spot near the lone boulder, returned to the waiting girl in the low-slung car, his face was unmistakably stamped with self-satisfaction.

The jubilant police officer might have lost some of his confidence in the success of his plan had he known that from behind a sheltering thicket two pairs of evil eyes had watched his every movement from the time the gray car had stopped by the roadside. Now that the coast was clear there emerged from that thicket a man with a wolfish, scar-marked face, who stood waiting while his blond lieutenant retrieved the white slip of paper intended to entrap the Laughing Mask. But scarcely had these



"They Were as Full of Fight as a Couple of Kilkenny Cats."

the embrace of his companion and stood gazing in startled surprise in the direction from which it came. At that moment a thick-set figure came catapulting through the hedge and bore down upon the Laughing Mask like a human cannon ball. The exasperated police captain, realizing he could no longer hope to take his enemy by surprise, had staked everything on this sudden rush. But the nimble-footed fugitive was off like a sprinter trying to beat a record, and by the time he reached the road he had gained a wide leap over his lumbering pursuer, who shortly gave up the chase and slowly retraced his steps, blowing like a winded truck horse.

"This is the second time you've harbored that criminal," he barked at the proudly erect young woman who stood facing Margery Golden, "an' as an officer of the law I give you warning it will be worse for you if you don't tell us where he keeps himself under cover."

"I shall tell you nothing," answered the openly defiant girl, "your bullying threats do not frighten me in the least, and I shall see that your insulting conduct is reported to the proper authorities."

With this parting shot the unruffled girl deliberately turned her back on the raging police captain and, with quiet dignity, made her way toward the white-pillared mansion. Nothing remained for that utterly routed arm of the law but to withdraw from the field of this disastrous verbal battle with the best grace he could muster, but already, in his somewhat limited range of mental activity, he had devised a new scheme for trapping the elusive masquerader, whose immediate capture he was more grimly determined upon than ever.

To his surprise Margery Golden promptly and steadfastly rebelled at the part which he had chosen for her to play in the consummation of this scheme, which savored to a certain degree of unscrupulous trickery. It was only by fanning the smoldering jealousy of the sorely tried girl that he was at last able to wring from her a reluctant consent to do his bidding. "The chances are he won't leave that good-lookin' doll for a minute, even though he thinks you are in terrible danger," had been his argument, which finally carried the day. Fearing that his hesitating confederate might exercise her woman's prerogative of suddenly changing her mind, the wily strategist immediately put

repellent lawbreakers left their cover when the thicket was again occupied by a stealthily moving figure.

The newcomer, straining to overhear the conversation between Jules Legar and Dutch Frank, wore that familiar and derisive mask of yellow.

"It's a trap to get our masked friend down to Wharton's quarry, where the bunch is waiting to gather him in," said Legar.

"I haven't got any love for that meddling masker, but this is too good a chance to miss. I've got some heavier scores than his to settle, and right now is the time to do it."

With a cold chill of apprehension the Laughing Mask remembered he had no method of reaching the distant quarry except by foot, and long before he could hope to reach his destination Legar would have had ample time to carry out his fiendish purpose. But anything was better than this maddening inaction, and although realizing the futility of his course he raced frantically along the road through the dust clouds raised by the black automobile, fast disappearing in the distance.

That swiftly moving conveyance bearing Legar and his vicious follower turned off into a seldom used wood road and shortly afterward came to a stop a little way back of the steep-walled granite quarry. As Legar peered over the edge of the perpendicular cliff, from which great blocks of stone had been sheared away by powerful explosives, an evil smile of triumph distorted his scar-furrowed face. For just beneath him were the figures of the portly police captain and two of his men crouching behind a ponderous upright slab of granite. Standing a little apart from the others was the sober-faced daughter of his long-hated enemy.

He saw the authoritative officer motion the dejected girl into the hiding place, and as with apparent reluctance she obeyed this mute signal the iron-clawed spy drew back from the cliff-edge and rejoined his companion, who was waiting by the automobile.

"They're down there, all right," Legar savagely exulted, in response to the questioning look of Dutch Frank, "and when we blow out the side of that cliff they are going to get crushed like rats in a trap."

"Then we can crank that bunch whenever you're ready, gov'nor," answered the blond gunman, with the red lust of murder in his eyes. "I had



Descended With Terrific Impact on the Watchman's Skull.

a look around, an' the switch exploded in the big blast is in that shanty just up the way. I seen it when I took a peek in the window. That dago watchman is sittin' right over it, but I've got somethin' here that ought to put him to sleep for a while."

He produced from one of his pockets a heavy blackjack, and this effective method of disposing of the quarry guard meeting with Legar's approval, the two conspirators moved in the direction of the nearby shanty.

But even at that moment fate ordained the happening of a certain incident which tended to give Legar's proposed victims, crouching at the foot of that great wall of granite, a barely possible chance for their lives. And in that unexpected incident the Laughing Mask took the leading part. As, completely exhausted from his first burst of speed, he stumbled falteringly along the dust-choking road toward Wharton's quarry, he had almost relinquished hope of being in time to warn the imperiled girl, whose self-appointed protector he had been.

Then Laughing Mask in his despair heard the hoarse and repeated coughing of an automobile horn as the impatient driver of a car rapidly approaching from behind signaled for a clear road. But instead of heeding those raucous notes of warning the Laughing Mask swung about and, planting himself in the middle of the highway, resolutely faced the oncoming automobile. With a sudden grinding of brakes the surprised and highly incensed driver of that car brought it to a jarring stop within a few scant feet of the determined figure disputing its passage. As the man at the steering wheel caught sight of the yellow mask covering the face of that figure he quickly fished under the seat and produced a heavy wrench.

"You can't pull this hold-up stuff on me and get away with it," he growled angrily.

"I'm not holding you up," came the quick answer, "but I've got to get to the stone quarry down the road and get there in a hurry. It's a matter of life and death!"

"I don't fall for that bunk," the driver retorted sharply; "get there if you want to, but not in this car."

The Laughing Mask realized every second was precious and that the other obstinately believed him a highway robber.

"Perhaps this will help persuade you to change your mind," he cried as he drew a black automatic and sprang upon the running board of the automobile. Thrusting the muzzle of the revolver against the startled man, he rapped out in tones that precluded further argument, "Now drive like the devil for Wharton's quarry or I'll empty this gun into you!"

There was no disputing that insistently prodding revolver, and the car shot forward as the overawed driver realized the desperate man in the mask meant business. It would be but a matter of a few moments before that speeding, swaying car covered the remaining distance, but even in that brief lapse of time Jules Legar might succeed in carrying out his terrible plan of revenge. For at that instant the scared outlaw knocked sharply on the sagging door of the watchman's shanty with his iron hook, while Dutch Frank slipped out of sight behind one side of the roughly-boarded structure. There came the sound of shuffling feet and then the Italian pushed open the door and stood interrogatively blinking at his sinister caller.

"I'm on my way back to town," Legar said in a smooth voice, "and somehow I got switched off the main road. I thought maybe you could set me straight."

As the obliging and unsuspecting foreigner advanced a few steps beyond the shelter of his doorway in order to point out the proper direction inch by inch there crept up behind him a savage-faced gangster, holding poised and ready to strike a murderous-looking blackjack. Suddenly that bludgeon descended with terrific impact on the watchman's skull, sending him heavily to the ground, where he lay inert and motionless.

As Dutch Frank stood with a cruel smile surveying the result of his handiwork Legar stepped over the

still form as indifferently as though it had been a fallen tree-trunk. Then, as he was about to enter the shanty, he paused for a moment on the threshold and flung a quick look over his shoulder. What he saw brought a snarling execration to his lips, for tearing down the precipitous hillside toward the quarry came an automobile driven at a death-courting pace. On the running-board of that madly lurching car precariously clung a man wearing a yellow mask. As in a swirling cloud of dust the car struck the foot of the hill that masked figure leaped wide to the side of the road and, miraculously retaining his footing, dashed into the quarry, shouting frantic warnings as he came.

Then it was that Legar realized his prey would escape him unless he acted without the loss of a second. He swung about and darted through the door of the shanty toward the pump-like electrical contrivance from which creeping wire tendrils extended to the mined cliff. But before his lean fingers could jam down the handle and make the connection which would produce the jumping blue spark of deadly power Margery Golden and the astounded detectives had leaped from their place of concealment and hastily advanced to meet the masked fugitive for whom they had been lying in wait.

"Legar!" he panted brokenly. "Legar is here—he's firing a blast—half the cliff will fall—hurry—hurry—in God's name—hurry!"

His words and manner carried instant and fearsome conviction, and that startled group about him, madly plunging for safety, barely reached the highway when a deafening, reverberating roar split the air and rocked the very ground under their feet.

For a moment the little group stood in spellbound silence, gripped by the suddenness of that mighty convulsion, and shaken by their own near approach to death. Then as the fine dust clouds accompanying the chaotic upheaval gradually settled it came to the scattered sense of the ungrateful police captain that the much-wanted Laughing Mask was standing close beside him. With a quick movement he clutched the wrist of that elusive fugitive in his strong stubby fingers.

"I've got you this time," he yelled out in triumphant tones.

But instead of replying to this somewhat premature statement the masked prisoner made a quick and dexterous tripping movement with his foot, at the same time giving his red-faced captor a violent shove that sent him ludicrously sprawling on his back. Then he darted into the quarry, threading his way amid the great piles of rock, with the police captain, who had now recovered his equilibrium, and the two detectives in full cry at his heels.

Margery Golden breathlessly awaited the outcome of that chase, for she realized that if this man, who had just saved her from a terrible death, was captured she would be responsible in large measure. The running figures were lost to sight, but presently the Laughing Mask broke from the cover of a great rectangular rock and, dashing past her to the opposite side of the road, threw himself face downward among the sheltering bushes. The next moment his pursuers emerged from behind the rock and came pounding toward Margery Golden.

"Which way did he go?" the gasping police officer demanded of the girl who held the fate of the Laughing Mask in her hands. After an almost imperceptible hesitation, she pointed silently toward the bend of the road. Hardly had the detectives, trailing this fake scent at top speed, disappeared around the turn than there stepped out of the bushes a masked figure bearing evident traces of exhaustion. Slowly he approached the girl, into whose eyes crept a look of stern reproach. Taking her hand he raised it tenderly to his lips.

"Won't you try to believe in me just a little while longer?" he asked in a low, pleading tone.

Then without waiting for her answer he relinquished that soft, white hand and ran up the road in the opposite direction from that taken by his pursuers.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)